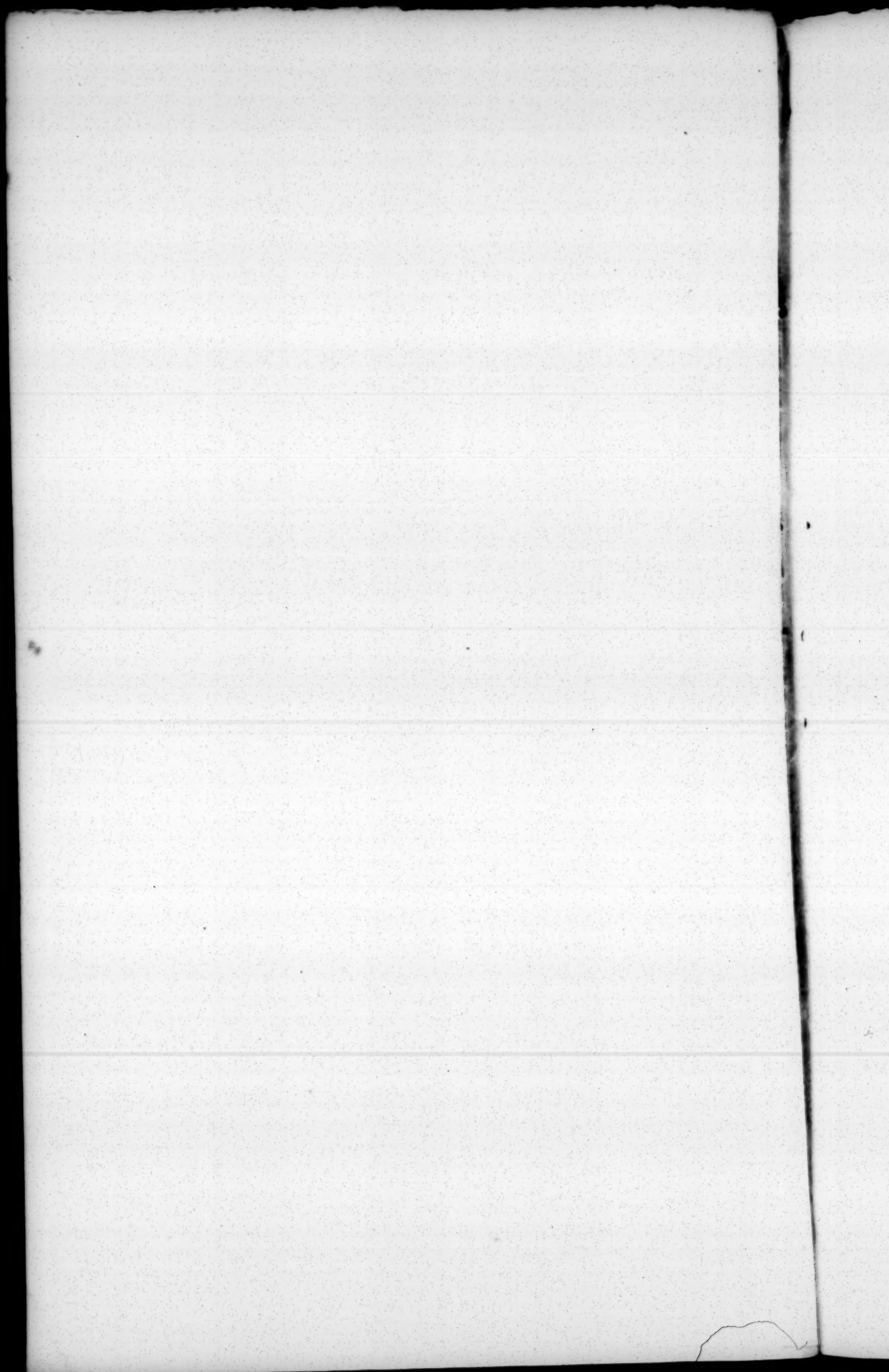


THOUGHTS

ON THE

PROSPECT OF A GREGICIDE WAR.

Price Sixpence.



John Cartwright 1801

THOUGHTS

ON THE

PROSPECT OF A GREGICIDE WAR,

IN A

LETTER

TO THE

RIGHT HON. EDMUND BURKE.

“Of them which thou gavest me have I lost none.”

THE GOOD SHEPHERD.

“When once it is come to calling Names, Argument is
“at an End.”

GEORGE III. *in Conference with Dr. JOHNSON.*

See Boswell's Life of Johnson.

LONDON:

Printed by

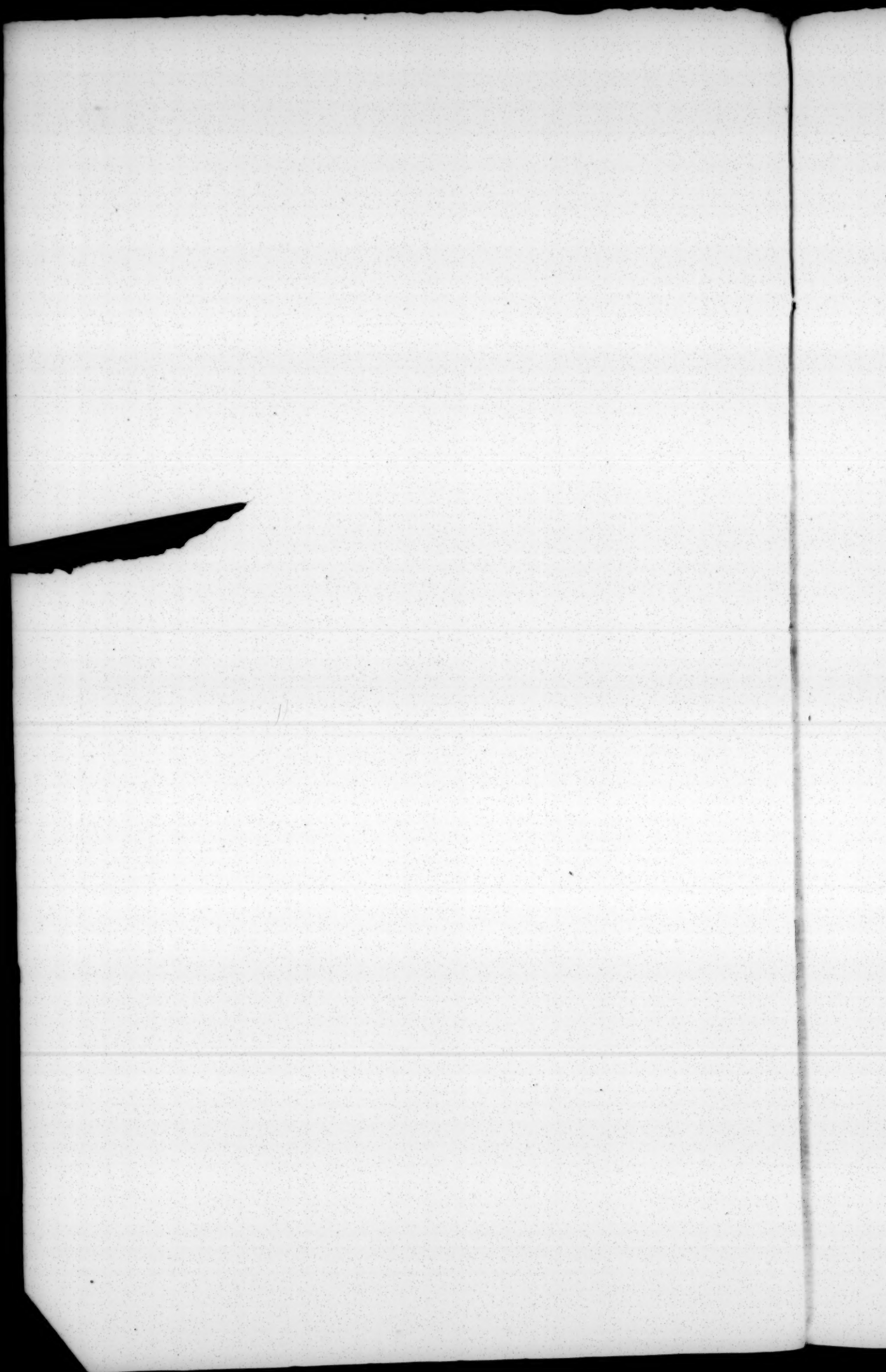
J. SMEETON, ST. MARTIN'S LANE, CHARING CROSS;

And sold by all Booksellers in Town and Country.

1796.

(5)

5



THOUGHTS

ON THE

PROSPECT OF A GREGICIDE WAR.

SIR,

HAD any one told me some years ago that I should become an antagonist to the great Mr. Burke, in print, the impar Congressus would have made me smile at the idea, but with no high opinion of my friend's discernment. So little however do we foresee our own course of conduct, that such an event hath come to pass, if I may call myself antagonist from the title of this tract, wherein I have to combat only the shadow stalking before, but marking so portentous a substance to follow, that well may I wish it to withdraw from the terrified eye of the world. You advance, Sir, indeed, as the great Goliath of war, and the staff of your language is proportionate to that character, pointed, I confess, with the keenest wit that perhaps

ever came from the powers of man. How shall I then presume to engage with, nay, even hope to disarm such an opponent, and bring him over to my side? Agreeably to the dimensions of our natural persons, I will act the part of David, and like him, advance to the combat, in the name of the living God, whom I think you also try to serve, but by means very ill adapted to the end. But to drop metaphor as far as possible, whereby I should only expose my inequality, let me advance to plain, solid, and cool argument, for as I wish my first motto to point out the subject of this address, undertaken in duty to the great Lord of us all, so am I anxious that the second should keep up respectful language to you, in consonance with the just remark of our good sovereign here on earth.

Let me premise one sentence on a tender subject, on which God grant you all human and heavenly' consolations, only to observe, that I enjoyed a slight acquaintance with your excellent son, whose gentleness of address shall be my intended model in the reasons I shall presume to lay before his father, and through that respectable medium before the eye of the world.

There

There has, Sir, been announced in the public papers, a pamphlet, intituled "Thoughts on the Prospect of a Regicide Peace," said to have you for its author. I cannot sufficiently commend the prudence of those, in my mind, who have recommended that it should be most cautiously revised, much less That of those, who, it is said, have with honest friendship, intreated its suppression. It may be saving you, Sir, from a dread responsibility in the most important hour of your life, the hour that shall translate you from a quickly fleeting, to an eternal world; where we must all be judged by Him, who came into this world not to destroy men's lives, but to save them. Doubtless you will say, Sir, such is your wish; Pax quæritur Bello. You hope that on the whole, lives will be preserved, civil war prevented, and in particular the life of our august sovereign secured by continuance of the present disastrous war, till the French shall submit themselves to our terms of peace. But, Sir, there is not a little to be said in reply to this statement. In the first place, "Doing evil that good may come," is unequivocally and emphatically condemned by the codes both of reason and revelation. "Seek peace, and ensue it,"

say they—But to argue from fact—think on the black and crowded catalogue of wretched unnumbered souls hurried into a dread eternity, imbued at the very moment of death with the foul tinges of drunkenness, malice and blasphemy; and all these made for wisdom and virtue here, and thereby for bliss and glory hereafter. These consequences have flowed on from year to year, from that cause which you, I dispute not, with the best intentions, espouse, but whether the cold cabinet calculations of our human strength to hold out, or the warm and piercing beam of the God of Mercy should be our motive, I leave to your own *impartial* reflection. I can believe you, Sir, to be a man not only of highest abilities but purest intentions, yet human commendations must be cautious to be serviceable, and I do suspect that many ties of human attachment may fetter a mind not yet etherial. I cannot persuade myself that lives have been preserved by the commencement and protraction of the war, or will be by its continuance. This is a grand point of comparison. You, Sir, think that without the war the French would have gained much more territory and influence, even than they have, and that more dreadful scenes still would have appeared. I, on the contrary,

contrary, think, that had war never been begun, the French would soon have discovered that they had only changed monarchy for anarchy, which ill suits the interests of any people, and that, after a fruitless experiment of change, they would have settled in a sober sense of the benefits of hereditary, though not indefeasible succession, which would have been secured by laws, binding both on king and people. I think further, that even during the frenzy of fraternization, had the surrounding powers, instead of sacrificing their subjects to the plan of enforcing schemes of human pomp and policy, spared them to the *great plan* of rationalizing those whom God made capable of, and thereby visibly commanded to be taught reason, the people had been so much attached to their respective governments, that no shifting gust of wind from the doctrines of France had ever been able to shake them. But as long as the bulk of a people is kept in ignorance, so long does their obedience continue more doubtful. Where God's plan and man's vary, vengeance, though it tarry, will surely come at last. I speak not this, Sir, from hatred of higher powers, no! I love them, but I speak it in the solemn conviction of my soul, and from a wish to
 avert

avert that which may perhaps affect my son when I am gone. For I too, Sir, have a son, very justly the joy of my heart; to his undoubted affection my advancing age looks for comfort: but should the high behest of him who gave that son, put a speedy period to the blessing, may my yearning heart acquiesce, and the change be happy for us both, as doubtless it will, though the manner be hidden. Yet it is not for him only, but for the whole human race that I plead, nay, respectfully and firmly remonstrate, on the denial of reason to the general bulk of mankind: in proportion as states have imbibed civilization, should the diffusion of it be general; but while luxury has such an ascendancy as at present, the powers of mens minds are less regarded than those of their hands, to the no small disparagement of our Maker's plan, who willeth not his best gifts to be wasted. I write this to you, Sir, from a room, where I could gladly receive you as a guest, and where, in addition to those stores of mind which seem, though slowly, to flow into me from daily intercourse with the great and good men, whose best remains are lodged on the shelves around me, I might relish the rich repast of your high-seasoned instructions. But the Mr. Burke whom I
would

would wish to see, should be the chosen companion of his and my late venerable friend, with whom he often associated in earlier life, when they took sweet counsel together, and as the patrons of piety, purity, and *peace*, planned the most honourable, because the most useful work for all future rising generations. A work tending to true moral heroism sublimated by the purest flame of christianity. Peace and honour to his truly noble soul!

May our latter end be like his!

I come now, Sir, to consider the second point whereon we differ, namely, that by foreign war, civil war will be prevented. Of two such horrid evils, the former certainly seems the least. But it is first to be shewn, that civil war would have ensued without the foreign, which has not yet been done; and I fear that unjust aggression may have left the danger great as ever, as our moral retribution; for I could never persuade myself that our interference was necessary, and no war unnecessary can be just. The balance of power can never be pleaded, while the overgrowing preponderance of Russia is permitted; but in truth, Sir, this balance seems a chimerical

rical idea, and pregnant with shocking consequences; that of keeping one half of Europe in standing hostility, or under continued state of suspicion to the other. God better direct us! History does certainly seem to make it appear that a foreign war has for a time checked domestic disturbances; but if the root of the evil were not destroyed, they have naturally risen up again. Such does our case threaten to become. We dazzle the people's minds by the blaze of war abroad, but do we enlighten them by beaming into them the rays of reason? If not, the fashion of the day may shape their conduct. This may depend on the good or ill success of our arms. The natural ties of life will also draw them forcibly; a friend, parent, son, or husband, whose life or health the war shall have destroyed, will out-argue many refined diplomatic arguments on the propriety of that war. And it is hard to kick against the compunctions of nature. Even to less connected, but reflective minds, the mass of responsible souls will make common nature recoil and shudder; and those are not circumstances to conciliate agreement with the supposed authors of such dire calamities, though christian charity will endeavour to construe well their intentions. What are the objects most valuable in life?

not

not rank, not riches, not power, as such, not luxury ; of these both you and I, though far from the highest steps, yet know the true nature, and I hope can be happy without them ; but they are contained in this extension of our poet's line—

Friends, books, good will, health, peace, and competence.

I always give the preference to arguments respecting human life, yet I have other strong doubts of foreign war tending to check domestic riot. Taxes are ever unpopular, and it is certain that they rapidly increase during all wars. They tend to the exportation of our specie, and thereby hurt so far our national security ; they tend to increase our luxury among those who are more the friends of power than of morals, and with others they tend to abridge comforts fairly so called. The time of our artizans must be nearly swallowed up to support the exertions needful to produce their amount ; and the little leisure left, they naturally, however blamably, devote to bodily excesses. Those who deal in the first articles of life, speculate for their own advantage to the manifest detriment of the community, and with such shrewd secrecy and mysticism, as to elude every legislative invest-

investigation. Excise examination rather for information than revenue, might perhaps, detect the evil; but the theory of trade in its political routine, is such a labyrinth, that the author of this letter dare not venture into it, lest he should never be able to extricate himself. All he will observe further on this ground of objection to the war, is, that the more necessaries a state provides at home, and the fewer luxuries it indulges in, the wiser, the better, the happier will all ranks of that nation be.

We come now to the last Remark on a Regicide Peace. I think, Sir, this epithet arose in your mind, during a loyal alarm for the safety of our well-beloved monarch; and that the strength of the first impression has made it difficult for you to efface it by any later force of reason. But I will not despair of convincing you; for as I do not enter the lists as your pretended equal, but only discharge a painful duty, propelled by a calm, but steady impulse, I dare not desert my cause, nor should feel glory in success, but rather gratitude, in being made an instrument to save the remainder of the poor human flock.

It should seem, Sir, that mentioning the prospect of a regicide peace, were a reflection,
though

though unintentional, on the ministers who should consent to what you deem such, as well as on the allegiance of the British Nation. How can peace with France oblige us to imitate them? Would ministers thus destroy their own protector? Would the people thus submit to be taught their lesson by others? I wish not to encourage national animosities, but I wish every nation to study other's laws and examples, to graft on its own stock what will improve it, yet not to be the servile copyist of any.

Surely, Sir, the less blood and money is spent in support of a throne, beyond what the decent splendor may require of the last, the more will the attachment of the multitude be. Take care, good Sir, that in advancing your arguments why a peace at present would be a regicide one, you do not inadvertently point out the means to make it such. In what a state would your mind be then? You see, Sir, I am not one who think you a jesuit, but only under impressions of pardonable kind which mislead your mind. I am mortifyingly sensible of my own general inferiority; but though I pretend to no supernatural illumination, I feel so firm a conviction that peace is essential to us, and, after peace,
rational

rational repair, leaving foundations firm, that I could not deny myself the satisfaction, nay, the supposed security to be derived from this address. As to any inaccuracies of sentiment or improprieties of language, if they affect me rather as a scholar than a moralist, I shall rest content with myself though under correction. If in the latter character they should derogate from truth, then shall I be truly concerned for my mistake. But though the words are rapidly struck out from my hand, the thoughts have had so long possession of my head and heart, without feeling from either any repulse, that I commit them to the world in humble confidence, that they may work, together with many other instruments at this most critical time, to procure us a moderate, pacific, and as far as may be independent parliament.

I will add a short observation on each of the mottos chosen for my title page. As to the first in order, incomparably the first also in consequence, if our blessed Saviour when his own person was in danger was so anxiously careful that none of his flock should lose their lives in defence even of his, how shall we justify the sending troops to defend wide distant territories, and foreign interests? How shall

shall we warrant capital executions? for while they are maintained, the difference between our and French cruelty seems only in degree. How shall we vindicate the support of the slave trade?—With respect to the second motto taken from one whom we both revere, as I hope, for the rectitude of his heart, I think the remark in question does no less honour to his head; for I have invariably observed in controversies either religious or political, that in proportion, as either anger or contempt have brandished their weapons, reason has kept aloof from the contest; she loves not to associate with abuse or sarcasm. Civility and humility are her satellites; and let us ever remember that she comes from the abode of truth and peace, with whom may we ever make friendship here, and be qualified, by asserting her just and eternal rights against all sinister arguments of this world to destroy them, to dwell in those realms of universal harmony, where war, and all its countless myriads of miseries shall exist no more.

I am, Sir, &c.

P. S. It seems impossible to support the shadow of a title to exclusive rights of intellect, except on the idea of transmigration,

B

which

which in process of time might give each a turn in the possession. But as that doctrine is too absurd to be maintained in the present state of human reason, it were fit that "pomp should take physic," not making difficulties like a child, but with the grace of a man, considering the greater usefulness of its character when recovered, and I believe I might add of its own calm and no longer restless feelings. If we feel the highest delight in the expansion of our own minds, on what principle can we refrain from the communication of our own first blessing as wide as the real wants of society will permit? I am no stickler for equality of luxuries, that is impossible; but let such as possess an ample income, be ready to distribute it in the encouragement of those advances which the general endowments of the human mind are capable of making, and which without some such encouragement to exertion, and leisure to effect it, would, we too well know, lie torpid and inactive, if they did not, self-directed, take an improper turn and prove a curse instead of blessing to themselves and their kind. How, Sir, could the mighty faculties of your naturally strong and highly cultivated mind be better employed in the evening of life, than in
shewing

thewing the possibility and directing the means to enlarge the reason throughout all ages and climes of those who were made to be happy through the due government of their minds, here and for ever?—Let us tremble, Sir, like Felix, over our charge, but not, like Felix, defer till more convenient season, its most important fulfilment!

F I N I S.



